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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000547

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PARTY CLOSURE CASE AGAINST RULING AKP -
THE LONG ARM OF THE STATE, LONG IN COMING

REF: ANKARA 541 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b), (d)
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11. (C) Summary and comment: Abdullatif Sener, former Justice and Development Party (AKP) MP and deputy prime minister -- and rumored possible leader of a post-AKP party -- told us the closure case was long in the making. He staunchly denied that AKP has any aims against the secular nature of the Turkish state. AKP's best course is to forge ahead with its agenda. If the party is closed and its top leadership banned -- which Sener sees as the goal of the case -- AKP may splinter until another charismatic figure pulls together a party of the center. Last July, when Erdogan excluded those close to Sener from the election lists, Sener chose not to run for parliament, though he keeps his hand in as a member of AKP's governing board. Whatever Sener's ultimate motives, he continues to both cast a critical eye on events and insert his views into the party. End summary and comment.

12. (C) Sener, now a professor at Ankara's TOBB University, told us the closure case against AKP was long in the works. Two years ago, he obtained a copy of a letter sent from the Court of Appeals' Chief Prosecutor's office to all provinces. The letter, from the prosecutor's office political section, actively sought instances of allegedly anti-secular AKP measures. Sener took it to PM Erdogan and said, "This is important." The PM was initially unconvinced. Sener responded that the political section of the chief prosecutor's office existed for one reason only: to document party closure cases. The chief prosecutor (then Nuri Ok) was actively soliciting documents for such a case. Soon thereafter, a circular went out from AKP headquarters to all provincial party organizations, directing that they take necessary measures. Those organizations paid attention; the central party organization was less meticulous.

13. (C) Asked whether AKP had fallen into an MHP-laid trap, Sener acknowledged many wonder about MHP's sincerity and aims -- and with whom they may be working behind the scenes. First came Abdullah Gul's election as President, with MHP facilitating the election of someone the military and many secularists can never swallow. Then came the headscarf amendments. Sener had seen a gradual softening among

professors and others; the confrontational approach AKP chose, in tandem with MHP, has probably set the cause well back. Now MHP has a proposal to change the constitution on party closures. Was MHP, he wondered, tempting AKP with another friendly proposal that risks getting the AKP into more hot water? Constitution Article 138, he noted, forbids legislative interference in ongoing cases. It was a puzzle, and MHP chair Bahceli is not, he stated, a democrat at heart.

14. (C) Sener dismissed as a red herring the notion that the "deep state" gang Ergenekon has had any hand in the current situation. The process of Ergenekon raids and arrests started two years ago. Its members are old and retired; they do not, in his view, have ties to current military leaders.

15. (C) People have been playing the secularism card against AKP for years, Sener stated, many of them disingenuously. Asked if there was anything to it, he responded, "Absolutely not. Not in the PM, not in those who work with him, not at the provincial level. There is no intention by anyone to change the secular nature of the state and government." He estimated support in Turkey for changing the secular order as minuscule. Sener related he has regularly asked people, quietly, if they really thought there was cause for worry. Until recently, most responded, "No, at heart we're not really worried." Now, when he asks the same question, more respond, "Yes, we really are worried." Even if there is nothing there, Sener said, AKP has to take people's perceptions into account and try to counter them.

16. (C) Whatever happens, he continued, the GOT must forge ahead with its parliamentary agenda for the people until the day they leave office. When people go to the ballot box next

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March for the local elections, they will look to AKP's performance. If the GOT reinvigorates its work on the economy, social programs and other priorities, AKP or its successor party will get votes. If they cede the field, they will not.

17. (C) PM Erdogan, Sener pointed out, has experienced four party closures over the course of his political life. Erdogan worked in the youth wings of the Milli Nizam Partisi (under Erbakan) and then the Milli Selamet Partisi -- both small, both closed. He was then in Refah (Welfare) as mayor, followed by Fazilet (Virtue). If experience doesn't teach, he wondered, what does? The Turkish system may be poor, but it is the system in which they must work. Why, he asked, would Erdogan take the risk? In the end, it came down to the 47% in last July's election. Erdogan and those around him probably saw the predecessor parties as relatively inconsequential, but thought that in the aftermath of last summer's vote, no one would dare touch AKP in this way. He came to believe in his own democratic rhetoric and underestimated the system -- not smart, but understandable, Sener said. Asked whether the PM has advisers who will give him the bad news, Sener responded that he does, but the PM tends not to want to listen.

18. (C) The goal of the case, in Sener's view, is not to ban all 71 AKPers named in the indictment; it is to ban Tayyip Erdogan and his leadership core, creating the vacuum that will split the party. If the party is closed, at least one new party will form to take on the AKPers. But different currents run in AKP and Sener was not at all sure that the AKP group would hold together. Without Erdogan at the helm, AKP could well splinter. In the end, though, it will depend on events and how other parties proceed. Baykal's People's Republican Party (CHP) is sinking fast and support for MHP is not great. ANAP (Motherland Party) and DP (Democrat Party) are moribund. What is wanted is another centrist party. Turkey's youth doesn't even remember what a center-left party is. Whoever jumps into that void, whether in an initial election or a subsequent one, may well gain enough votes to form a single party government. Turks are fickle voters, he

concluded, who change party allegiances quickly.

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